

College Threat Assessment Forum Training Needs Survey and Focus Group Report

Executive Summary

The 2008 General Assembly enacted a new law (Code of Virginia § 23-9.2.) requiring each public institution of higher education in Virginia to establish a violence prevention committee and a threat assessment team. In order to assist Virginia colleges and universities with these requirements, the Office of Campus Policing and Security in the Virginia Center for School Safety, Department of Criminal Justice Services, held a College Threat Assessment Forum on July 29, 2008 at John Tyler Community College-Chester Campus.

Seventy-three people representing 38 Virginia institutions attended the day-long forum (see Table 1). Approximately one-third of the institutions have established violence prevention committees and one-half have threat assessment teams. Almost all of the survey respondents thought that their institution could benefit from more training.

Survey participants strongly endorsed all eight of the proposed training topics (see Figure 1), with highest endorsements for:

- Training in confidentiality and information sharing regarding threatening individuals;
- Campus-wide violence education and prevention strategies;
- Procedures for coordinating threat assessment and intervention with community agencies;
- Legal issues in taking action in response to threatening individuals.

When asked to describe their greatest need, problem, or concern, participant responses clustered around the same primary topics listed above, but also noted the need for strategies to engage students, faculty, and administrators, as well as information on determining the seriousness of a threat. Participants noted the limited resources of community colleges in conducting threat assessments and interventions.

The focus groups revealed the wide variety of approaches that Virginia institutions of higher education use in response to threatening situations. Only a few institutions have documented procedures such as flow charts. Some have developed memorandums of understanding and established cooperative relationships with local mental health agencies and medical facilities, but most have not. Virginia institutions vary considerably in their access to law enforcement and mental health services, ranging from those with their own police departments and mental health agencies to those that have neither.

There is a striking need for clarification of how and when information can be shared within the institution, and with community agencies and parents. Threat assessment teams must be adaptable to the nature of the case; for example, student threats require direct involvement by student services, but threats by faculty or staff require human services involvement. The forum was successful in identifying the violence prevention and threat assessment training needs of Virginia institutions.

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Seventy-three people representing 38 Virginia institutions attended the day-long forum (Table 1). These included 23 colleges or universities, 13 community colleges, 1 medical school, and 1 seminary. There were 28 public institutions and 10 private institutions. The attendees included 11 Police Chiefs, 10 Directors of Security or Public Safety, 8 Vice Presidents, 8 Directors of Counseling Centers, and 7 Deans.

Table 1. Institutions Represented at College Threat Assessment Forum

CBN/Regent University	Piedmont Virginia Community College
Central Virginia Community College	Radford University
Christopher Newport University	Rappahannock Community College
College of William and Mary	Roanoke College
Danville Community College	Southern Virginia University
Eastern Virginia Medical School	Southside Virginia Community College
Emory and Henry College	Thomas Nelson Community College
George Mason University	Union Theological Seminary & Presbyterian School of Christian Education
Germania Community College	University of Mary Washington
ITT Tech – Richmond Campus	University of Richmond
John Tyler Community College	University of Virginia
J. Sargeant Reynolds Community College	Virginia Commonwealth University
King College	Virginia Intermont College
Liberty University	Virginia Military Institute
Lord Fairfax Community College	Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University
Lynchburg College	Virginia State University
Norfolk State University	Virginia Union University
Northern Virginia Community College	Washington and Lee
Patrick Henry Community College	Wytheville Community College

Forum participants were asked to complete a brief survey (see Appendix A) regarding the status of their efforts to establish violence prevention committees and threat assessment teams, and to identify their training needs. Participants also met in smaller focus groups to discuss how their institutions deal with a series of common threat scenarios. This report presents the results of the survey and focus groups with the goal of identifying training needs.

Survey Results

Fifty-nine people representing 34 institutions completed a Threat Assessment and Violence Prevention Training Needs Survey (see Appendix A) at the Forum.

Status of violence prevention committees.

Participants were asked to describe the status of their violence prevention committee and whether it needed training by choosing one of four options. As shown in Table 2 below, about half of the participants/institutions reported that they had a violence prevention committee, but nearly all agreed that they could benefit from training.

Table 2. Status of violence prevention committee

Which statement best represents the status of your institution? Circle one	Number of Participants	Institutions ²
Our <i>violence prevention committee</i> is:		
Already established and requires no additional training	1	0
Already established, but could benefit from additional training	25	10
Not yet established, but will require no training	0	0
Not yet established and could benefit from training	32 ¹	20

¹Includes 4 participants from the same institution who reported that they had a committee established for students, but not faculty/staff.

²There were eight institutions whose representatives did not report the same status for their violence prevention committee, but all agreed on the need for further training.

Status of threat assessment teams.

Participants were asked to describe the status of their threat assessment teams and whether it needed training. About half of the participants/institutions reported that they had a violence prevention committee, but nearly all agreed that they could benefit from training. The table below summarizes responses tallied for number of participants and for number of institutions. (Note that multiple participants from the same institution could have responded unanimously or not unanimously in checking one of the four options.)

Table 3. Status of threat assessment team

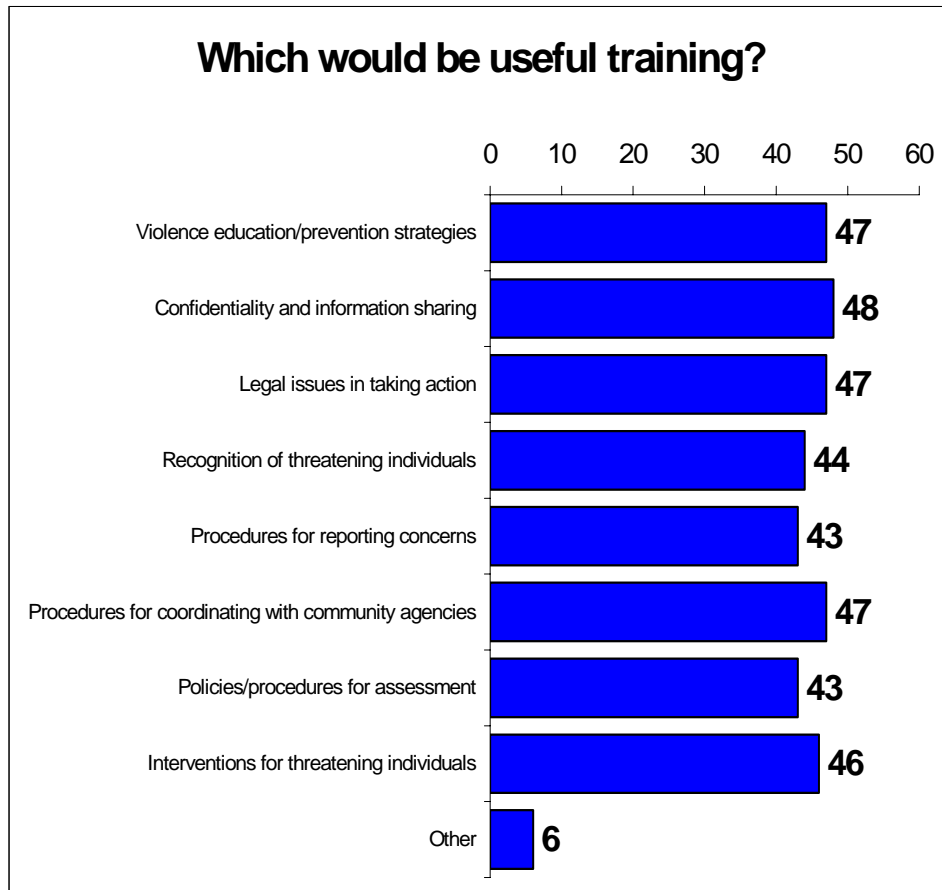
Which statement best represents the status of your institution? Circle one	Number of Participants	Institutions ²
Our <i>threat assessment team</i> is:		
Already established and requires no additional training	1	1
Already established, but could benefit from additional training	30	14
Not yet established, but will require no training	0	0
Not yet established and could benefit from training	28 ¹	15

¹Includes 4 participants from the same institution who reported that they had a committee established for students, but not faculty/staff.

²There were four institutions whose representatives did not report the same status for their violence prevention committee.

Training needs.

Participants were asked to identify topics that would be useful training for their institution from a list of 8 items (plus an “other” category). The 8 items were derived from the statute. All of the topics were endorsed by at least 73% (43) of the 59 respondents, suggesting that all needed to be covered in training. The most endorsed topic (81%) was “confidentiality and information sharing.” The list of topics and endorsement rates are presented in Figure 1 below.

*Written policy*

Participants were asked whether their institution has a written policy regarding verbal threats of violence. Thirty-five (59%) of the 59 respondents reported that their institution has such a policy and 33 (56%) indicated that the policy is shared with students.

Greatest needs, problems or concerns regarding the new legislative requirement

The survey asked respondents what they regarded as the “greatest need, problem, or concern for your institution in establishing a functioning violence prevention committee and threat assessment team.” Their 48 written responses were grouped into five general categories, presented in Table 4 below:

1. Communication and information sharing
2. Engaging administrative and faculty support
3. Training and development of policies and procedures
4. Determining when a threat is serious and how to respond
5. Adequate resources (funding and personnel)

Table 4. Needs, Problems or Concerns for Institutions

Communication and information sharing:
Coordinating all of the above among campus community: faculty, staff, and students
Involve various levels of threat assessment; involve all campus on training regarding plan and cross section of key people on threat assessment team
Recognizing signs of troubled individuals and passing on information
Information sharing and trained personnel
Education and awareness for entire community, not just emphasis on students; establishing better reporting methods and matrices
Sharing of info from university and community based counseling and mental health organizations
Sharing of sensitive information
Better communication
The ability for law enforcement and university leadership to work together; understanding of critical needs and importance
Interpretation of confidentiality laws
Clarification of FERPA for high-level university administrators
Engaging administrative and faculty support:
Gaining understanding and support of faculty for policies and procedures
Not currently required by law at private institutions so hard to get administrators to understand the need
Administrative support, placing it as a priority at the school
Unwillingness to participate, denial of responsibility
My institution is small, relatively violence-free school, and staff tends to become complacent in regard to potential threats.
Understanding and "buy it" from all departments
Getting administrators to understand that real threats exist
We need to start from the ground up. Somehow make our powers that be understand it's not enough to say we are "referral agency."
Organizational structure, leadership/ownership
Gaining the support and engagement of faculty and staff regarding policies and procedures
Time to implement - may not be priority for college community
Training and development of policies and procedures:
Written policies, procedures, guidelines, protocols regarding this and other sensitive issues
Policies and procedures
Ability for the whole university command to understand policies and procedures related to threats to community safety
Planning in a vacuum - we need more input from other institutions, organizations who may have encountered things that we have not. It is hard to think of everything!

Since establishment, we still have formalized procedure needs.
Documentation and retention of records
Exact membership and how often to meet/convene
Training
Training
Training and guidance
Ongoing training for our threat assessment team and development of more formal team procedures
Determining when a threat is serious and how to respond
How to identify individuals prone to violence
When to involve the threat assessment team, when is it a viable threat?
Concern that we might violate the rights of those individuals who we intervene with
Guidance on translating mandates into practices which are ethical and legal
Community colleges do not get to know students as well as residential schools as students may only be on campus for short periods of time.
Learning the differences between threats
Effective implementation
What constitutes a threat, what is appropriate for review by threat assessment team
Identifying effective interventions and options, particularly with regard to faculty
Determining whether a given situation really poses a threat
Adequate resources (funding and personnel):
Better funding for materials and equipment
Appropriate mental health experts available to the students
Not having the resources if referrals are necessary
Scheduling
Money to protect student and faculty properly; policies and laws that mandate the SRO Program in Higher Education

Conclusions from Survey

In conclusion, almost all Virginia institutions of higher education desire training on violence prevention and threat assessment to comply with the new law. All eight of the main topics proposed in the survey were endorsed by approximately $\frac{3}{4}$ of the forum participants and should be covered in the training (see Figure 1), with highest endorsements for:

- Training in confidentiality and information sharing regarding threatening individuals;
- Campus-wide violence education and prevention strategies;
- Procedures for coordinating threat assessment and intervention with community agencies;
- Legal issues in taking action in response to threatening individuals.

When asked to describe their greatest need, problem, or concern, participant responses clustered around the same primary topics listed above, but also noted the need for strategies to engage students, faculty, and administrators, as well as information on determining the seriousness of a threat. Participants also noted the limited resources of many institutions, particularly community colleges, in conducting threat assessments and interventions. The training should recognize the limited resources of many institutions, particularly community colleges. These conclusions should be integrated with results of the focus group discussions that were conducted as part of the forum.

Focus Group Results

After attending a series of presentations on college safety and threat assessment, participants divided into six focus groups to discuss a series of hypothetical scenarios (see Appendix B) designed to elicit information about their current threat response procedures. The questions posed to the group and notes taken by the focus group leaders are presented on the following pages.

Instructions for Focus Groups

“Use scenario (a) as the main point of discussion. It may require as much as half the allotted time. Use the other scenarios as time permits and in less detail. If participants raise new issues that seem important, it is ok to spend a few minutes getting input on them and making notes about them. Our main goal is to identify the concerns of the participants and get a sense of how they function and what they need from us.

Scenario. How would the following situations be handled at your institution if they happened now? Notes should identify how information would be communicated to others and who would take what action.”

Scenario A. Threat of a faculty member.

A faculty member complains to the Department Chair that a student who received a low grade has threatened to “get even with you in the worst way.”

Group	Responses to Question 1. Does your institution have a student code of conduct that covers this situation?
1	Yes – All participants agreed they had a code of conduct to cover this.
2	Participants had student handbooks and code of conduct, available on website, some annually notified – on web Va. Tech autonomy – consult the faculty and staff. If it is legal especially to level the code of Virginia – magistrate & judicial referral – Depends on faculty what they want to do. Carry charge forward, get consent of victim – many variables; Team policy – requires for crimes to be reported – role independent of what is happening on the administration side.
3	No response.
4	All institutions had a student code of conduct
5	Yes
6	institutions have a policy

Group	Responses to Question 2. What sources of information would you examine in conducting your investigation?
1	Has he purchased a firearm? Does he have a criminal record? Is there any documentation in juvenile affairs? Students; faculty & professors; Residents Life folks; family? If a freshman, go back to high school, high school SRO?
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Go to records & management – see what contact in past • Criminal past convictions, concerns • Provide information to counsel • Website, facebook, what posted – sometimes private, etc. • Weapons – ATF and State Police tools to evaluate • For full time investigation 60. • Social data base, student incident. Dean of Students keeps data base
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • interview students – judicial review • faculty • student affairs • residents life • other students • facebook, myspace, etc. • blackboard accounts • past history • transcript • academic advisor, major department • previous schools • laptop (school owned, connected to school network)
4	Faculty concerns, track record of students on watch list, law enforcement computer checks, look at past history, work with police departments, look at email correspondence, solicit reports from any faculty on “remarkable” students, look at “blackboard” web contents, routinely look at transcripts for deterioration of performance, look at school issued laptops, look at personal laptops if connected to network (campus security and dean of students review this information together); with imminent threats, they will confront the student and may do a judicial referral for further action; one school has a very close relationship between judicial folks, VP of student life and police department.
5	No response.
6	Campus police would talk with professors, witnesses, other students. Could be reported to student affairs, faculty member could notify security directly, could be reported to Dean (security may no be contacted). Depends on who gets the first call. Security does more extensive first pass (review background). For VCU and W&M first contact is police. Dynamic may change depending on police force vs. hired security firm. Differences in collaboration with 4 years schools vs. community colleges

Group	Responses to Question 3. What problems or barriers would you encounter in obtaining or sharing information?
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • difficulty in securing info re psychiatric problems • reluctance of administrators/colleagues/Student Affairs to provide info on student • Communication, in and of itself with student, could be a barrier • Barrier on community college/2 year school w/no campus residents – school hesitant/uncertain of their responsibility to student or visitor committing act. When local law enforcement becomes involved, will they release information to the community college? Should the community college allow the student back on campus? • “Any student conduct/violation to law must go to Student Services, illegal or not.” • There are different levels of threat assessment. Get FACTS on student before escalating to next level.
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HIPPA compliant – counseling issue • Victim of violence • Attorney, counsel • Issue – harder to get faculty to cooperate than students/staff
3	No response.
4	No response.
5	No response.
6	Information sharing key to determining if a threat assessment is truly serious. Fewer folks to share with and make assessment with community college than 4 year school. Community colleges not staffed with mental health professionals and some don't have police department. Too many pieces for one person to make the call. Norfolk State – anonymous tip line.

Group	Responses to Question 4. Who makes the decisions in how to deal with this case? Who has input?
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Administration Student Services/Student Affairs Campus Police School Attorney/General Counsel A multi-disciplinary team; dean of students, division of psychology “Student Services” is starting point unless it is already a “crime” “Our school has a weekly meeting with our team to discuss certain student concerns” “depends on severity” “dead in water without Student Services”. They are in the loop automatically and a working relationship with them is paramount. Student Services is the key ingredient that connects the dots and is part of all colleges regardless of campus police dept or security dept. Student Services can insist that student receives services e.g. mental health. They have leverage to do this where police/security do not.
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> mutual decision anyone can say bring it to the team, Chief of Police, Chairs Attorney always present When does it go from case team All directed to Dean of Students unless an emergency Trainings – if they do not report incurring liability Misconception freedom of speech, safety trumps academic freedom. Any policy with documentation How to handle distressing writings – not official policy department specific – discussing problem students Gov report – strong language – should report <u>ALL</u> to Dean of Students verses reality..... Few that report everything
3	No response.
4	<p>Depending on the situation law enforcement will get involved initially and then involve student affairs; in other situation, student affairs will initially be involved and then police. They noted that a lot depends on relationships; if faculty/staff members know law enforcement, they may contact them directly. The final decision as far as student status belongs to student affairs; the final decision regarding criminal removal belongs to law enforcement. VCU has a flowchart process which tells faculty/staff who to report if situation with student, who to report if situation with faculty; if imminent danger, they know to report to police; if other level, different processes. Small schools (800 students) treat incidents more urgently</p>
5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Law enforcement investigates Part of team: community, human resources, registrar, employee, faculty, law enforcement, student affairs, attorney for university, but changes based on who is being assessed
6	Depends

Group	Responses to Question 5. Under what circumstances would you contact parents?
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When they are a danger to themselves or to others. “Safety & welfare trumps everything.” • No contact with family if determined to not be in student’s best interest
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • money • education record • official record – academic • Exception with health/counseling (covers all except police records) • Dean of Students covered by FERPA • Encourage faculty to call parents with concern • Once written down – part of record • Person made observation can always call • If safety rules go out door
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • student affairs contacts • only if safety is threatened by parents knowledge • contacted about alcohol/drug for under 21 • Threshold? (changes since Tech)
4	<p>They all agreed that they would contact parents if there is a health and safety issue that warrants it and if it is not contraindicated by the treatment plan; mental health is part of the consideration in terms of notification of parents; VCU takes conservative approach – if safety issue will contact parents; there was a lot of discussion about what the new threshold is for contacting parents</p>
5	No response.
6	<p>Dean of students, for adult student? Community colleges could involve local police and mental health representatives. Norfolk State attempts to have an independent health assessment of student – this is an issue because students lack insurance, no funding for this independent evaluation.</p>

Group	Responses to Question 6. What would happen if you suspect that the student has some kind of mental health problem?
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “we had a complaint. There was no record of threatening behavior. We interviewed the student and found him to be unstable, took him to hospital, he was committed to mental health.” • problem exists where person on campus is not from the local campus jurisdiction e.g. Virginia State where Petersburg’s District 19 services are readily available, but resident halls are part of Chesterfield...tough to get treatment. • Problem exists where there is no policy concerning individuals that should not be on your campus and may be posing threat—just call local law enforcement in these cases
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • mandatory assessment to student center • Failure to comply interim suspension – if refuses • No interim suspensions • parents involved they leave more • removes student temptation until assessment • one appeal with J. board system • employees – paid for evaluation – if need for evaluation
3	No response.
4	No response.
5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • gather information • one point of reference • multi-disciplinary input • access to student info
6	<p>What happens when student is under care of C. S. B.? And after? What communication is there? <u>Disconnect</u>. Sometimes mental treatment program – “take a class at a community college”. Also – with on line not equipped to deal with this. Courses lack of student/faculty in person contact</p>

Group	Responses to Question 7. How would your response change if this case did not involve a student, but an employee?
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • we would take control, become the emergency coordinating officer and call local LE based on the report • written policy is necessary • good faith law is exercised • follow the written guidelines “once established”! • act according to relationships established with Emergency Response • Report to Human Resources and VP • Involve the police • Document!
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outset – employee stay • Decide if fired • If someone to keep • Less invested with employees • Suspend with pay and investigate • Suspend without pay if criminal • No core team • Management go to threat team • Reality staff/ - if not fired letter, police, legal counsel, threat assessment • Faculty employees different • Provost/legal counsel/police • Assessment for faculty and staff • Also, might contact spouse – many related to each • Different cultures coming in with no background • Hazing with faculty – part of bullying • Grad students, etc, may not be same as bullying
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HR becomes involved • Code of conduct • School legal counsel • Law requires including faculty and staff (T.A does not currently exist, privacy major concern) • Model need to be developed to incorporate all (staff, faculty, students) • Incorporating workplace violence and threat assessment • Need for subgroup to focus on faculty/staff law
4	if issue with employee, the responsibility shifts from student affairs to HR; police and HR become lead; employee standards of conduct, faculty manual etc kicks in
5	No response.
6	To detect issue? Do you handle threats from employees differently? Yes – more history with adults. Limitations of EAP’s. Security records should be kept separate from student academic records. Due diligence important if behavior is odd or out of character. Different approach to facility access, student I.D. issuance. More burden on faculty at community colleges. Try to follow guidelines (established) to do all that can be done – all reasonable ca????

Scenario B Bomb threat. A dorm entranceway is discovered to have graffiti saying, “This building is going to blow up on Wednesday.”

Group	Responses to Question 1. Who makes the decisions in this situation?
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • police department • rarely evacuate
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Call police • Criminal side • President • University relations • VP Student Affairs • meet on call 24/7 • Police Chief chair • Legal counsel • Human resource • Counseling Director • Assistant VP of Students • Dean of Students
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Law enforcement (if imminent danger) • Emergency management team
4	If you assume the bomb threat is imminent, law enforcement makes the decision; if you assume you have a few days before the threat is implemented, the emergency management team would be involved and it would have to go as far as the president and involve communications people
5	No response.
6	No response.

Group	Responses to Question 2. What problems or barriers interfere with your handling this situation to your satisfaction?
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • people thinking it's fiction • not enough information in order to evaluate • hysteria • Under what circumstances should there be evacuation? • Media attention. (Give the info to media relations and let them handle.) • Multiple threats lead to complacency • more evidence, beyond graffiti, is necessary when decision making
2	Combine students and faculty threats do not have to educate others on team
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PR (course in EMT) would deal with medical have standard comm. Plan • Need for stronger PIO (training!)
4	Most emergency management teams have communication sub-teams; one of the challenges is that some communications people are great at PR but not good in a crisis so there was a lot of discussion about training for public information officers on dealing with media in a crisis.
5	No response.
6	No response.

Group	Response to Question 3. Who would deal with the media and what would be communicated to them?
1	“Media Relations”
2	Point person chief of police – function has some trained people, emergency goes to police non-dean of students
3	No response.
4	See response to #2.
5	No response.
6	No response.

Scenario C. Hospitalization. A student is hospitalized for suicidal behavior at a local hospital.

Group	Response to Question 1. Are there any arrangements in place that would permit you to find out about this event? Under what conditions would you find out?
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We would not know! • we are trying to establish collaboration with local depts./health/hospitals to get reports. • Any information channeled to us (e.g. via “field interview” would be maintained in our files for future reference. Information would be provided to student services. • Main barrier is getting the info from the institution – FERPA
2	No response.
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MOU with local hospitals & CSB’s (underdevelopment for some) MOU will cover HIPPA • Differs based on campus (commuter, residential) • Family/friends notify faculty • Re-entry programs through student affairs
4	Some of the colleges have MOUs for notification with local hospitals; some don’t have MOUs with local hospitals; the MOU covers HIPPA; typically they find out from students’ friends or families; find out through police and folks who transport student to hospitals
5	No response.
6	No response.

Group	Response to Question 2. What actions would you take when you learned that a student was hospitalized for this reason?
1	Discussion here revolved around the definition of “suicidal behavior” as well as the reporting of an attempted suicide to the student’s family. There were mixed opinions. Some indicated they would discuss this with a suitable family member....Others said they would not.
2	No response.
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offer assistance by student affairs • Re entry if student admitted to hospital
4	One college when notified by local inpatient units sends student affairs rep on student request to visit student and offer assistance and links to counseling center
5	No response.
6	No response.

Group	Response to Question 3. What problems or barriers would you encounter in obtaining or sharing information?
1	No response.
2	No response.
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Urgent vs. emergency • FERPA – Perceptions as to what can be shared • Convenience (ex. Late night calls, more pressure on one person) • Training!
4	The #1 problem is related to different interpretations of imminent vs. non imminent danger; FERPA interpretations of what can and cant be shared with parents, faculty, staff
5	No response.
6	No response.

Group	Response to Question 4. Who makes the decisions in how to deal with this case? Who has input?
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student Services • Security • Student Health • Police Dept • Residence Life
2	No response.
3	No response.
4	One said depending on the immediacy of the situation the police department with it’s 24/7 communications center becomes the hub of dissemination and communication; who makes the decision of how to deal sometimes results from a conflict between convenience and the right thing to do – e.g. in the middle of the night, the police officers are asked to provide a lot of information that becomes a mental health assessment that they are not necessarily trained to do; the police officer will have a different reaction than the counselor because they

	don't have all of the history
5	No response.
6	No response.

Group	Response to Question 5. Under what circumstances would you contact parents?
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> one response: "in all instances except where a danger to the student, and after that determination had been made" another response (from a community college setting): "no contact with parents...just keep an eye on student and let Student Services know about the attempt."
2	No response.
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> times when parents know before school school hears from other students
4	Some schools have blanket policy to contact parents if any hospitalizations
5	No response.
6	No response.

Group	Response to final question. Are there any other kinds of situations or areas of concern that are especially problematic for your institution?
1	No response.
2	No response.
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Student create video for u-tube of signs to look for Video on college website about new laws (FAQ's) Guidelines around documentation needed for threat assessment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What should I include How long to keep it Sharing with other institutions Focused on behavior not diagnosis Residential vs. non residential difference Private vs. public institutions Fostering resilience lacking in community colleges Disconnection with off campus students
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Student to student education about making help seeking normative behavior; THEY WANT BEST PRACTICES that campuses can share; one campus is planning to use YouTube to encourage students to look out if they see something wrong; will also put a FAQs section on the page to assuage concerns about contacting parents/administration and encourage students to seek counseling and help. They asked for guidelines around documentation (e.g. if police department is the keeper of information on threat assessment, depending on who it is released to, it becomes part of the educational record; what kind of records to keep?, what kind of detail?, what is or is not documented?, who is the holder? how long do you keep it?)

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need to keep focus on behavior issues, staying off the diagnosis; don't penalize the condition but address the behaviors; • Consider differences between community and residential colleges, public and private colleges • One community college is working to foster resilience among students. • The group did express concerns about the new challenges with the new legislation; much of the training, work that has been done has focused on students but law will require threat assessment of faculty and staff as well; faculty will have concerns about privacy if being discussed in this threat assessment process/group; one participant noted that a number of universities have threat assessment processes in place for faculty, staff and students (VCU); recommended addressing this as a workplace violence issue in introducing to staff; they wanted Dr. Cornell and DCJS to look at how the expanded campus model for threat assessment will address faculty and staff issues. VCU noted they have a university safety committee and threat assessment will be a subgroup with some different people and a different charge; he noted the two functions – education and threat assessment -will be different.
5	Missing link = feedback/info back from mental health to campus
6	No response

Conclusions from Focus Groups

The focus groups revealed the wide variety of approaches that Virginia institutions of higher education use in response to threatening situations. Only a few institutions have documented procedures such as flow charts. Some have developed memorandums of understanding and established cooperative relationships with local mental health agencies and medical facilities, but most have not. Virginia institutions vary considerably in their access to law enforcement and mental health services, ranging from those with their own police departments and mental health agencies to those that have neither.

There is a striking need for clarification of how and when information can be shared within the institution and with community agencies and parents. Threat assessment teams must be adaptable to the nature of the case; for example, student threats require direct involvement by student services, but threats by faculty or staff require human services involvement.

Appendix A

Threat Assessment and Violence Prevention Training Needs Survey

July 29, 2008 Forum at John Tyler Community College

The purpose of this survey is to gather information that will help us assist Virginia colleges and universities comply with Virginia's new law requiring a violence prevention committee and threat assessment team at each public college or university.

Printed Name _____

Title/Position _____

Institution _____

Which statement best represents the status of your institution? Circle one	
Our <i>violence prevention committee</i> is:	
A	Already established and requires no additional training
B	Already established, but could benefit from additional training
C	Not yet established, but will require no training
D	Not yet established and could benefit from training
Our <i>threat assessment team</i> is:	
A	Already established and requires no additional training
B	Already established, but could benefit from additional training
C	Not yet established, but will require no training
D	Not yet established and could benefit from training
Which of the following topics would be useful training for your institution? (Check all that apply)	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Campus-wide violence education and prevention strategies
<input type="checkbox"/>	Confidentiality and information sharing regarding threatening individuals
<input type="checkbox"/>	Legal issues in taking action in response to threatening individuals
<input type="checkbox"/>	Recognition of threatening individuals
<input type="checkbox"/>	Procedures for reporting concerns about threatening individuals
<input type="checkbox"/>	Procedures for coordinating threat assessment and intervention with community agencies
<input type="checkbox"/>	Policies and procedures for assessment of threatening individuals
<input type="checkbox"/>	Interventions for threatening individuals
<input type="checkbox"/>	Other
What do you regard as the greatest need, problem, or concern for your institution in establishing a functioning violence prevention committee and threat assessment team?	

Appendix B

Questions for College Safety Forum focus groups

Use scenario (a) as the main point of discussion. It may require as much as half the allotted time. Use the other scenarios as time permits and in less detail. If participants raise new issues that seem important, it is ok to spend a few minutes getting input on them and making notes about them. Our main goal is to identify the concerns of the participants and get a sense of how they function and what they need from us.

Scenario. How would the following situations be handled at your institution if they happened now? Notes should identify how information would be communicated to others and who would take what action.

- a) Threat of a faculty member. A faculty member complains to the Department Chair that a student who received a low grade has threatened to “get even with you in the worst way.”
 - 1. Does your institution have a student code of conduct that covers this situation?
 - 2. What sources of information would you examine in conducting your investigation?
 - 3. What problems or barriers would you encounter in obtaining or sharing information?
 - 4. Who makes the decisions in how to deal with this case? Who has input?
 - 5. Under what circumstances would you contact parents?
 - 6. What would happen if you suspect that the student has some kind of mental health problem?
 - 7. How would your response change if this case did not involve a student, but an employee?
- b) Bomb threat. A dorm entranceway is discovered to have graffiti saying, “This building is going to blow up on Wednesday.”
 - 1. Who makes the decisions in this situation?
 - 2. What problems or barriers interfere with your handling this situation to your satisfaction?
 - 3. Who would deal with the media and what would be communicated to them?
- c) Hospitalization. A student is hospitalized for suicidal behavior at a local hospital.
 - 1. Are there any arrangements in place that would permit you to find out about this event? Under what conditions would you find out?
 - 2. What actions would you take when you learned that a student was hospitalized for this reason?
 - 3. What problems or barriers would you encounter in obtaining or sharing information?
 - 4. Who makes the decisions in how to deal with this case? Who has input?
 - 5. Under what circumstances would you contact parents?

Are there any other kinds of situations that are especially problematic for your institution?